REMARKS

Claims 1-19are active in the application.

The specification has been amended as requested in the Office Action.

5   Specifically, the specification and Abstract have been amended to correct spelling errors.

Additionally, the specification has been amended at page 6, line 14 to change "topic synchronizer" to "time synchronizer" so that it is consistent with Fig. 2.

Claims 7 and 12 have been amended to correct typographical errors.

Claim 1 has been amended to require that the topic separator is an automated

10   topic separator that separates messages according to words that are used in the messages. The automated topic separator automatically detects a change in topic. Similarly, claim 8 has been amended to require that topic identification is performed automatically based on words used in the message. These amendments are supported by text at page 6, lines 17-28, which describes automated techniques for topic separation and classification.

15   Claim 2 has been amended to require that the topic separator is responsive to the time synchronizer to determine topical relationships. In other words, the topic separator employs data from the time synchronizer to determine which messages are related by topic. This amendment is supported by the specification at page 6, lines 8-16, which, for example, states: "according to the time stamp, it is possible to know what message of one

20   user would relate to the message of another user".

Claims 16 and 17 have been added. Claims 16 and 17 require that the messaging system allows a subgroup of users to conduct a messaging session separately from other users of the messaging system. The separate messaging sessions may or may not be conducted in secrecy. This new feature in the claims is supported by the specification at

25   page 7, lines 1-17, and associated Fig. 3.

Claims 18 and 19 have been added. Claims 18 and 19 require that the automated topic separator indicates to the user when the topic of a received message could not be decided. This new feature in the claims is supported by the specification at page 7, lines 13-17, and page 4, lines 2-5.

30   The present invention provides a method and system for conducting messaging sessions in which an automated topic separator separates messages or parts of messages

according to topic. The automated topic separator does not rely on user-specified topic separation. Since the topic identification and separation is provided automatically, users in a messaging session are free to converse naturally and without interruption. Users of the present system do not have to stop to organize message threads according to topic, or to identify for the computer messages that belong to particular topics.

Additionally, in the present invention, the topic separator utilizes information from the time synchronizer to determine the topical relationship between messages. In other words, the topic separator uses the time stamp on messages (in combination with message word content) to determine which messages share a common topic, and which do not. Timing information helps the topic separator remove ambiguity when the topic of a message is not clear. This aspect of the invention is described in the present specification at page 6, lines 6-16 and page 3, line 20-page 4, line 5. The type of ambiguity that can be resolved with timing information according to the present invention is described at page 2, lines 4-17.

These aspects of the invention are represented in claims 1, 2, 8, and 11 as amended, which specifically require that the topic separator functions automatically (i.e. without requiring a user to identify topics or sort messages according to topic). Accordingly, the present invention is patentably distinct over the prior art, and offers efficiency and time-saving advantages that cannot be achieved by the prior art.

Claims 1-5 and 8-12 were rejected under 35 USC 102(e) as being anticipated by US Patent 6,557,027 to Cragun. These rejections are traversed.

Cragun teaches a system and method for managing online discussions in which messages are sorted according to topic. Significantly, Cragun teaches that <u>users</u> select and discriminate messages according to topic. Cragun does not teach or suggest automatic topic separation. For example, in col. 5, lines 50-52 Cragun states: "each entered message is either associated with a default sub-topic or associated with a particular sub-topic <u>by means of a selection list such as a list box 620</u>." Referring to Fig. 7 in Cragun, the list box 620 provides a menu of topics from which the user can choose. Cragun in col. 5, lines 54-55 states that buttons 580 582 are "for creating new subtopics <u>with operator-specified titles</u>". Fig. 6 shows that the buttons 580 582 are selectable by the user to create new topics. Similarly, col. 9, lines 9-12 of Cragun state: "Chat client program 260 then

determines whether the operator associated the new message with a new sub-topic, for example by entering the new message in the message input field 570...". In this section, Cragun clearly teaches that the operator, not the computer or any automatic software, that categorizes messages according to topic. From these sections and other teachings in Cragun, it is clear that Cragun relies on the user to separate topics and identify new topics, which is very different from the present invention.

Cragun appends a field or header to each message that indicates the topic of the message as provided by the user of the system. By comparison, in the present invention, specialized computer software determines the topic of a message based on the vocabulary and language in the message. These differences are expressed in the claims as amended, and, accordingly, the rejections of claims 1 and 8 must be withdrawn.

Additionally, it is noted that in the present invention messages can be analyzed so that parts of messages are split according to topic. This aspect is reflected in claim 1 which states that parts of messages can be represented in a distinct way. Cragun does not teach or suggest topical message splitting. Cragun is only capable of separating entire messages that have a single topic. In the present specification, topical message splitting is described in page 7, lines 1-6.

Claims 2 and 11 were rejected as being anticipated by Cragun. These rejections are traversed. Cragun does teach a time stamp. However, claims 2 and 11 require much more than merely a time stamp of messages. Claim 2 requires that the time stamp is used by the topic separator (the portion of computer code that separates messages according to topic) to "determine topical relationships between messages". Similarly, claim 11 requires topic change detection "using the time of the received message". Cragun does not teach or suggest that the time stamp can be used to elucidate topical relationships between messages, as required by claims 2 and 11. Accordingly, the rejections of claims 2 and 11 must be withdrawn.

Claims 6 and 14 were rejected under 35 USC 103(a) as being obvious in view of a proposed combination of US Patent Application 2001/0028364 to Fredell et al. These rejections are traversed.

Claims 6 and 14 require that the identity of a user of the present messaging system is authenticated by other users of the system. Specifically, claims 6 and 14 require

that other users verify the answers provided by the user being authenticated. In this way, it becomes the choice of a user whether or not to accept the given authentication attempt of another user. Therefore, the user can determine the importance of proper authentication. This is described on page 10, lines 5-27 of the present specification. By comparison, Fredell et al. teach a very different concept. Fredell et al. in paragraph [0089] teach a method for storing and distributing contact information such as phone number, email, fax number and so on. Specifically, Fredell et al teach an "online user directory that is accessible to all project participants". In this way, all users can have access to the contact information of other participants. This is very different from the present invention as claimed in claims 6 and 14. Fredell et al. does teach security measures, but the security measures taught by Fredell et al. are conventional, well known methods employing passwords and the like for user identity verification. In Fredell et al., the verification is performed by the computer (see paragraphs [0045], [0046], [0054], and [0056], and also claim 18 which teaches a "unique sign-on credential..."). Nowhere do Fredell et al. teach or suggest user-user authentication as required in claims 6 and 14, and therefore the rejections of these claims must be withdrawn.
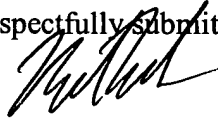
In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully requested that the application be reconsidered, that claims 1-19 be allowed, and that the application be passed to issue.

Should the Examiner find the application to be other than in condition for allowance, the Examiner is requested to contact the undersigned at the local telephone number listed below to discuss any other changes deemed necessary in a telephonic or personal interview.

A provisional petition is hereby made for any extension of time necessary for the continued pendency during the life of this application. Please charge any fees for such provisional petition and any deficiencies in fees and credit any overpayment of fees for the petition or for entry of this amendment to Attorney's Deposit Account No. 50-0510

5   (Whitham, Curtis & Christofferson P.C.).

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